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SUBJECT: WESTERN BAHR EL GHAZAL - SOURCES OF FRAGILITY

REF: a) KHARTOUM 0452, b) KHARTOUM 2140, c) KHARTOUM 0491

Summary and Comment

¶1. A team of USAID staff and key USAID partners visited Wau town in Western Bahr el Ghazal State and Aweil town in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State from February 22 to 26. The trip was part of a series of visits to areas of USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) programming to investigate causes of fragility and how USAID/DCHA programs might reduce the potential for conflict. This is the first of two cables on the visit and covers meetings and issues raised in Wau.

¶2. Interlocutors in Wau primarily voiced concern over the large number of Fallata nomads entering the state with cattle herds, trampling the season's cassava crop. Residents also noted that nomads are armed and carry Thuraya satellite phones. Residents expressed fear that the nomads are motivated for a potential "land grab" that could destabilize the area. Returnees face challenges related to access to land, essential services, and resolution of conflicts with host populations.

¶3. Support to Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) state and county officials in Bahr el Ghazal is critical, as is support to local authorities at the grassroots and village level. The GoSS in Juba should be strongly urged to get financial resources out to states and counties as quickly as possible and to undertake projects that directly help the people. USAID should continue to support the community-based approach to the provision of essential services with particular attention to the most vulnerable war-affected populations, without regard to their status (displaced, returnee, or resident). USAID should also continue to support localized peace and reconciliation efforts, including those that address nomad-farmer relations, in Bahr el Ghazal and elsewhere in Southern Sudan. End summary and comment.

Background

¶4. From February 22 to 26, USAID representatives and key

partners visited Wau town, the capital of Western Bahr El Gazal State, to investigate how USAID programs might reduce the potential for conflict and promote a stabilizing environment to support the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The USAID team included USAID/Khartoum's internally displaced persons (IDP) returnee specialist, an Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) southern sector program officer, the Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) southern sector team leader, and an education specialist. Three staff from USAID/OTI partner Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), and one representative from USAID partner PACT, also participated in the visits. USAID/DCHA is supporting a number of NGOs and U.N. agencies in Western Bahr el Ghazal in sectors that include water and sanitation, health, and livelihoods.

Wau Town Meetings

15. The USAID team held numerous meetings with implementing NGO partners, U.N. partners, and GoSS officials, including the Deputy Governor, to discuss the potential for conflict and factors affecting stability in Western Bahr El Ghazal. In addition, on February 23, USAID held a general meeting at Peace Hall for more than 20 participants, including GoSS officials from the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRC) and Ministry of Education; representatives from USAID-funded NGOs such as International Rescue Committee and CARE; representatives from non-USAID funded NGOs such as Islamic Relief and Norwegian Church Aid; and representatives from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

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Affairs, the U.N. Development Program, and the U.N. Mission in Sudan.

16. Wau town was a Government of Sudan (GOS) garrison town during the North-South civil war. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) surrounded Wau in the rural areas, so Wau was accessed via airlift that was highly dependent on weather and airstrip conditions. Food and commodities prices were high due to a narrow private sector monopoly on commerce. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), road traffic has opened, but land mines and poor road conditions still limit access. Nonetheless, Wau is now contiguous with the rest of the state, an important element in the peace process. Despite this, the USAID team found that Wau is still divided into Arab and non-Arab neighborhoods and business districts, although some integration is visible and freedom of movement is evident. GOS flags and GoSS flags adorn the respective neighborhoods. Arabic remains the dominant language of commerce. Most signs in Wau town are in Arabic. (Note: The wall outside the SRRC office has a signboard that reads "SRRC" in English, and above it, written in larger Arabic script is "HAC," the abbreviation for the northern Humanitarian Aid Commission. End note.) Radio Omdurman plays loudly everywhere. It is difficult to find someone who listens to or has even heard of the USAID-funded Sudan Radio Service that broadcasts in English. In summary, Wau town still retains its garrison town character and looks towards Khartoum rather than Juba for business, trade, and transportation.

Sources of Fragility

17. Migration of Fallata nomads through the state and invasion of nomad cattle into farmland: Nomad migration routes have changed in recent years and cattle have destroyed this season's cassava. This year citizens say

that the nomads are armed more heavily and have Thuraya satellite phones, suggesting to some interlocutors that there was another motive for their movement, such as land grabbing. The persistent fear of nomads voiced in Bahr el Ghazal (Ref A), Abyei County (Ref B), Unity State (Ref C), and other areas that border nomad migratory routes is understandable given shrinking resources in the north and the inevitable pressure on land to the south. The conflict in Darfur feeds this fear. The GoSS's capacity to address this issue and other potential sources of conflict is weak.

¶8. Proliferation of small arms: Although a civilian disarmament campaign is underway throughout Bahr el Ghazal, small arms continue to infiltrate the area. (Comment: This might also invite protective arming by the nomads against a perceived threat from the local residents. End comment.)

¶9. Lack of essential services for hosts and returnees: Essential services are lacking in Wau town and throughout the state. As returnees and recently displaced IDPs continue to pass through and settle in the state, conflict may arise over limited resources and services. To some extent, there is a clash of cultures between returnees from the north and those who remained in the south throughout the war years.

¶10. Land and plots for returnees and settlers in and around Wau town: Land issues have not been addressed adequately due to the lack of appropriate and equitable laws pertaining to land and plot acquisition. Many returnees may opt to settle in town for a variety of reasons, such as lack of services in the rural areas and the presence of landmines in rural areas.

¶11. Weak GoSS capacity: The capacity of the GoSS in Wau town is limited, and it is unable to meet or manage the expectations of the people.

¶12. Slow progress in implementing the CPA: This is a major concern, and it was also obvious that the average

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citizen understands very little about the CPA.

¶13. Nonpayment of the army: As throughout the south, there is concern about the nonpayment of the army and the implications for civil order.

¶14. Tribalism and corruption: These issues continue to be widespread. Traditional conflict between ethnic groups such as the Fertit, Luo, and Dinka in Western Bahr el Ghazal simmers both beneath and above the surface.

Recommendations

¶15. Traditional leaders need assistance in dealing with inter-tribal matters, specifically relations with the Fallata, and other issues that involve land, water, and migration routes for cattle.

¶16. Provision of essential services, notably water and sanitation, should be a high priority for the GoSS and donors. Returnees should not be targeted for special assistance, but rather assisted through an equitable, community-based approach. Essential services should be established as much as possible in rural areas to prevent returnees from overwhelming Wau town.

¶17. Standing up an accountable GoSS state government system is critical. People need to believe that government is serving the needs of the people, not the other way around. GoSS ministries should replace NGOs as

service providers as soon as possible. The GoSS must incorporate traditional authority into new governing structures.

¶18. Most of the population do not understand or are unaware of the new administrative system of the GoSS. Dissemination of the CPA as well as an explanation of the GoSS administrative system is necessary. In addition, some groups feel excluded from the CPA and perceive the agreement as a power-sharing arrangement only for SPLM and National Congress Party.

¶19. The first phase of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program is focusing on registration of child soldiers, women associated with armed groups, and the disabled. Some individual disarmament is occurring in some states with weapons being cantoned for later demobilization. However, the most urgent priority for purposes of peace and stability is the registration of the SPLA soldiers, so that payment can be effected. Even veterans have yet to be retired and have high expectations.

¶20. Grievances and revenge issues between groups need to be confronted and addressed through reconciliation, rule of law, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

WHITAKER